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DRAMA

A MONTHLY RECORD OF THE THEATRE
IN TOWN AND COUNTRY
AT HOME & ABROAD



CONTENTS

MARCH, MCMXXXIX

PLAYS OF THE MONTH: BY
STEPHEN WILLIAMS / THE FIRST
ENGLISH EXPRESSIONIST: BY
ALWYN ANDREW / THE
THEATRE IN HOLLAND / SOME
CRIMES OF THE AMATEUR.
ILLUSTRATIONS

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DRAMA

VOL 17

MARCH, MCMXXXIX

NUMBER 6

THE JOURNAL OF THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE

PLAYS OF THE MONTH

By Stephen Williams

THE most eagerly awaited play in London during the past month was Mr. Noel Coward's "Design for Living." True, Mr. Coward is no longer the rage he was ten years ago, when he paraded the gold-paved streets of two continents as a kind of *enfant terrible* who was popularly supposed to attend witches' Sabbaths, sport a cloven hoof and breakfast on newly-slain children. But there was always a lingering hope that he had put away that rather childish sophistication which tickled our palates in the years after the War, and would at last give us something really creative. The hope was vain. Mr. Coward remains a Bright Middle-aged Thing with a pathetic and unquenchable faith in the meretricious smartness which we accepted for wit in the naughty nineteen-twenties. In an age in which everything most precious to the spirit of man is daily, almost hourly, threatened with destruction there is something faintly nauseating in an attitude of mind that still mechanically goes on scoffing at social conventions which, with all their "stuffiness," were more valuable than anything we have found to put in their places. Perhaps if we had preserved more of them, we might have avoided the mess we are in to-day.

"Design for Living" is the story of a young woman who is so much in love with two young men—a painter and a playwright—that she cannot be faithful to either of them. So when one goes away he invariably returns to find the other wearing his pyjamas and presumably enjoying all the privileges that such an attire suggests. It is a dreary theme, garnished with much dreary facetiousness which Miss Diana Wynyard, Mr. Rex Harrison and Mr. Anton Walbrook do their best to disguise as wit.

Perhaps, however, my taste for Mr. Coward had been spoiled by Dr. Goldsmith at the Old Vic on the previous evening. "She Stoops to Conquer" is not, in my opinion, among the first half-dozen English comedies, but I would rather watch Kate stooping than Gilda wallowing any day. This was a brisk, rapid, noisy and thoroughly faithful production. Mr. Tyrone Guthrie, who usually itches to put the classics in their places, was wise in leaving Goldsmith to speak for himself—through the eloquent mouths of Mr. Edward Chapman, Mr. George Benson Miss Margaret Yarde and other accomplished players.

The best comedy of this very young year, however, is Miss Lesley Storm's "Tony Draws a Horse" at the Criterion. Miss Storm has such a keen sense of humour and such a gift for neat and happy dialogue that I for one would be quite content to sit and listen to her characters' conversation even if she had not an ingenious story to tell at the same time. "Tony Draws a Horse" has nothing to do with racing. It is the story of a little boy, son of a medical man, who draws a horse, in embarrassing detail, on the wall outside his father's consulting room. Tony does not appear—nor does the horse—and the play deals with the family's complicated disputes on the merits or otherwise of Tony's painfully realistic art.

Two other comedies—"Worth a Million" at the Saville and "Little Ladyship" at the Strand—seem to have caught the public's fancy quite successfully. They are really farces, the first because of itself, the second in spite of itself. "Worth a Million" introduces to us a simple-minded youth who is so sublimely unlucky that anything he touches

PLAYS OF THE MONTH

turns to dust and ashes. He is exploited by a gang of crooks as a sort of inverted mascot. Mr. Claude Hulbert, Mr. Edmund Gwenn and Mr. Billy Milton prove themselves a great deal funnier than the parts written for them.

"Little Ladyship," adapted from the Hungarian by "Ian Hay," might be mistaken for a sequel to his recent play of school life, and there is really no reason why it should not have been called "House-mistress." It tells of the "girl-wife" of a middle-aged surgeon who becomes cruelly bored with her little ladyship and during the day dresses as a school-girl and secretly attends an academy for young ladies. The plot fairly shrieks its improbabilities at you, but it is made mildly funny by Miss Lilli Palmer as the wife, by Mr. Cecil Parker as the surgeon and (especially) by Mr. David Tree in an exquisitely sensitive and intelligent study of a callow young "maths." master. This young actor is rapidly proving the truth of heredity. As a song-writer recently remarked, only God can make a Tree.

Mr. Patrick Hamilton's study in criminal psychology, "Gas Light," (Apollo), did not harrow me as intensely as it harrowed some of my colleagues. Mr. Hamilton has, nevertheless, a powerful sense of atmosphere, and the stifling gloom of a late-Victorian household and the terror of a woman married to a murderer, who attempts to provide her with a design for dying by driving her insane, are very skilfully suggested. Mr. Dennis Arundell, with the sinister charm and flowing whiskers of the typical nineteenth-century lady-killer (in both senses) is a subtly disturbing influence. Miss Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies has a strenuous evening as the distracted wife, and Mr. Milton Rosmer's solid, businesslike detective renews one's confidence in the law. There is also an excellent sketch by Miss Elizabeth Inglis of a saucy parlourmaid with ambitions to become her master's mistress.

I have left the best to the last. This is "The Mother," Karel Kapek's last play, which Mr. Jack de Leon put on at the "Q" theatre—that invaluable nursery of West End successes. It is really an emotional outcry against the futility of heroism. You remember Boswell telling Johnson that music made him want to rush into the thickest part of the battle? "Sir," said Johnson, "I should never hear it if it made me such a fool!"

Capek's mother loses her husband and

five sons, who respond to various "calls" by hurling themselves into the thickest parts of various battles. Each returns to her in memory and tries to convince her that the sacrifice was worth while. But it is hard to convince a mother that such costly heroism is anything more than selfish vanity. Miss Louise Hampton gives a performance of sustained power which miraculously avoids monotony. Miss Kathleen Robinson has bought the play and is presenting it for a West End run at the Garrick Theatre.

Another well-merited "promotion" is the transfer of the Gate Theatre Revue to the Ambassador's Theatre, where it opens on March 6th.

ENGLISH SCHOOL THEATRE SOCIETY

Relegation to the realms of the examination syllabus is indeed the first stages of immortality, and although such a fate is imminent, Shaw's "Saint Joan" has so far escaped. It is all the more interesting therefore to find that the huge auditorium of the Winter Garden Theatre was filled from top to bottom with school-children from London and the home counties during the four matinée performances of this play which the English School Theatre Society presented with a first class professional cast in February. For performances for school-children so often have an ulterior motive, and the "uneducational" pleasure of revelling in theatrical entertainment during school hours without previous priming or the text-book on one's knees has been until now comparatively rare. That it must be quite a thrill playing before such an audience there is no doubt. These children have none of the average theatre-goers' inhibitions. If the play grips, they sit tense and taut with excitement, if the play bores, they begin to fidget and cough, if the play amuses, they laugh wholeheartedly and unreservedly. It is a distinct tribute to the acting and production that the attention of this audience, except for a justifiable moment during the Inquisitor's address, was unswerving, and their ingenious enjoyment should encourage the English School Theatre Society in their efforts to produce a theatre-conscious generation.

PHILIP L. LORRAINE.

THE FIRST ENGLISH EXPRESSIONIST

By Alwyn Andrew

THERE is a tendency to dismiss the plays of Barrie as suitable mainly for children and maiden aunts. They are always "safe." The fashionable adjective to apply to his work, if it were fashionable at all to mention it, would be *fey*. And yet he appears to have a strong claim to the title of the first English Expressionist. Pioneer work in the little understood and much abused realm of Expressionism would seem to be a thing apart from his laughter-through-tears gentleness. But where in the English theatre can be found an example full of Expressionism, both in matter and in form, earlier than the dream scene of his war-time play "A Kiss for Cinderella"?

The only earlier possibility seems to be Galsworthy's short play "The Little Dream," which appeared in 1911. This playlet is well named, since four of its six short scenes represent the dream of a mountain maiden. Her name is Seelchen, which is the German for little soul, and in her dream she becomes the vague symbol for the soul of man in pilgrimage. Now while a certain symbolism is one element of Expressionism, its chief characteristic is subjectivity. Obviously a dream is peculiarly subjective, and so here we might expect to find an early example of Expressionism. The dream symbolism is well carried out. One of the two men who kiss her in the first (realistic) scene becomes identified with a certain mountain peak, and the other personifies a second peak, while the summit of the range speaks at last with the voice of the Final Mystery. The personified peaks offer her different modes of life, which she follows in turn, in the company of now one and now the other of the two rivals. But in the end, both are lost, and she passes on to the Final Mystery. All this is shown in dream form, where things and persons slowly glow into existence and fade again, and where seconds and minutes and hours are of no account. But although it is mainly in dream form, it is not a true dream and it is not true Expressionism. The fantastic paraphernalia of Flower Figures, Forms of Sleep and Moth Children have their place neither in dream life nor in Expressionism.

Obviously a dream is one of the most subjective things possible, since it is all created by the dreamer himself. A true dream scene is always expressionistic. The dreams in English plays before "A Kiss for Cinderella" are not really in dream technique. Nor, for that matter are they always so after that play: the dream, for instance, in "Ten Minute Alibi" was no more dreamlike than the rest of the play. Such scenes are more like slices of play sandwiched between larger chunks of similar stuff. Perhaps the most famous dream in modern English drama is the Juan in Hell episode of Shaw's "Man and Superman." Even a perfunctory examination of this conversation will show that it is a dream in name only: it lacks those shifting and unstable mutations and that annihilation of space and time which come from true dream logic. Such dream scenes may be fantastic, but their fantasy is grounded on the observation of normal physical appearances, and any eccentricity derives not from the subjectivity of their dream form, but from the requirements of plot or the fanciful and wayward imagination of the dramatist. Dream logic obeys only one rule, that thinking makes things so. It is the essence of subjectivity.

Such whimsies as Galsworthy's *Flower Figures* and *Moth Children* are fantastic rather than expressionistic. Fantasy is waywardly imaginative and its chief function is to provide a release from actuality and an escape from life through the mechanism of wish-fulfilment. Expressionism, on the other hand, is intellectually analytical and its chief function is to interpret life through the creative vision of the artist. Expressionism is essentially subjective. It seeks to present the Thing itself subjectively rather than to represent the Thing manifested objectively. This inevitably leads to a certain distortion of phenomenal reality. Of course, distortion is present in every work of art: Expressionism occurs when the subjective vision is of more importance than the accuracy of objective reproduction. It is instructive to contrast the fantasy of "Dear Brutus," "If" and "Brain" with the expressionism of the dream

THE FIRST ENGLISH EXPRESSIONIST

scene in "A Kiss for Cinderella," and of "Within the Gates" and "Murder in the Cathedral."

The dream scene in Act Two of "A Kiss for Cinderella" is conceived in the manner of a real dream, and is modified throughout by the imagination of the Cockney waif supposed to be dreaming it. Its technique shows many resemblances to Strindberg's dream plays, but the dream itself differs from them in being only a part of a larger whole. The similarity between this dream and that of Hauptmann's "Hannele" is striking. Hauptmann wrote his "Traumdichtung" in 1893, more than twenty years earlier. In both cases the subjective creator of the dream is a little girl lying in a state of feverish delirium; in both cases the action of the dream is built up out of the child's past life; and in both cases the hero of the naturalistic action becomes identified with some other person playing a chief part in the dream. In Hauptmann's play the dream is the chief interest, but in Barrie's it is more incidental and constitutes only one out of four scenes. Hauptmann shows but little naturalistic action that can be worked up into dream form, and the basis of some of his Hannele's distortions can be inferred only; but practically all Cinderella's travesties are traceable to the preceding action.

One play of 1913 shows some surprising similarities to "A Kiss for Cinderella." This is "The poor little rich girl," by Eleanor Gates, which won the praise of no less a critic than George Jean Nathan, and achieved the distinction (I think) of a screen version with Mary Pickford as the heroine. But Hauptmann was a German and Mrs. Gates an American, and so Barrie still leads the expressionist movement in England.

The war-time story of Cinderella, whose real name is Miss Thing, is rather slight. She is the skivvy of the great Mr. Bodie the artist, in whose studio the first scene is set. This studio contains a replica of the Venus de Milo and also a stuffed Bishop Penguin, and both these oddments appear later in Cinderella's dream. Here we are introduced to the Policeman, to Mr. Bodie and to Miss Thing herself: and we learn that Cinderella is particularly proud of her small feet, has a vivid imagination and once attained the rapture of going to a horse show. When she falls asleep in the snow outside her little shop "The Penny Friend" she is very excited and

a little feverish. Then her Godmother appears in a Red Cross nurse's uniform—a modulation leading through fantasy from naturalism to expressionism. Cinderella's three wishes are granted by the Godmother who then speaks both to her and to the audience:

"Now let this be my downtrodden godchild's ball, not as balls are, but as they are conceived to be in a little chamber in Cinderella's head."

In that phrase is contained the whole of expressionism. And as the lights fade on the huddled figure, we are transported to

"The night of the most celebrated ball in history, and we see it through our heroine's eyes. She has, as it were, made everything with her own hands."

This ball scene is fully subjective, and forms a kind of fantasia on the story of Cinderella, expressed in terms of the preceding naturalistic action. Such an episode in a longer play cannot be very intricate, yet its unfolding includes or transmutes many things previously seen or heard. The competition of the beauties for the Prince's hand is strangely like that famous horse show, and oddly enough they have to submit to the Therm-o-meter test of goodness, whose only way to salvation is the registering of the mystic number 99. This is distorted from the scene in "The Penny Friend," which also provided a basis for the Royal shilling-in-the-slot meter and the enormous penny with Cinderella's head on one side of it which is the Lord Mayor's standard. The scene in Mr. Bodie's studio contributed the Venus de Milo, who fails the test and is taken away to be broken up by the Censor, and the Bishop Penguin—"a penguin or a bishop, they melt into each other on great occasions"—who marries Cinderella to her Prince.

Although the action takes place specifically in a ballroom and finishes on the stroke of midnight, it yet has a fluidity like that of dream life. This effect is obtained by such inconsequences as the presence of street lamps on the dance floor or the appearance of the Bishop Penguin in answer to a mere wish for the solemnisation of marriage. The Censor, too, frequently "comes into prominence" behind unsuccessful competitors and adroitly dispatches them. The royal family all hang voluptuously on to straps because strap-hanging in the underground was a rare delight for Miss Thing.

The characters are all types. This again is a mark of expressionism: for where one character alone is fully expressed, all other



HAMLET (ALEC GUINNESS) AND HIS MOTHER (VERONICA TURLEIGH), IN THE MODERN DRESS "HAMLET" NOW TOURING ON THE CONTINENT, AND FIRST PRODUCED AT BUNTON AND THE OLD VIC BY TYRONE GUTHRIE.
(From the original drawing by Veronica Haigh.)



MAIRE O'NEILL AS THE WIDOW QUIN AND
PAMELA GIBSON AS PEGEEN (THE PART
ORIGINALLY CREATED BY MISS O'NEILL)
IN "THE PLAYBOY OF THE WESTERN
WORLD" BY J. M. SYNGE, NOW RUNNING
AT THE MERCURY THEATRE, LONDON.

THE FIRST ENGLISH EXPRESSIONIST

persons are seen through his eyes. Even our nearest and dearest are to us merely an agglomeration of types. So the feverish imagination of the waif fashions them from her store of fairy tales and the scraps of knowledge picked up from hearsay. Thus there is Lord Times, who was "created by Cinderella on learning from Mr. Bodie that the press is all powerful and that the 'Times' is the press." There is also the Censor, so active in war-time and so invisible, whom she imagines is "long and black and thin, dressed as tightly as a fish, and carries an executioner's axe." The king and queen are attired like their portraits on playing cards and even the dress of Prince Hard-to-Please, who bears such a breath-taking likeness to the Policeman, "may a little resemble that of the extraordinary youth seen by Cinderella in her only pantomime." The courtiers "have character in the lump, if we may put it that way, but none individually": one willingly forgives Cinderella this small failure of a surprisingly prolific imagination.

The dialogue remains naturalistic in the everyday sense: it attempts neither poetry nor "telegraphese," and is by no means symbolic. It is, however, subjective, for all the characters created by Cinderella naturally speak in her vernacular. Even His Majesty, addressing the assembled "ladies and gents all," drops a very occasional aspirate.

The construction of the dream scene has certain similarities to the construction of a piece of music, for phrases and episodes of the preceding naturalistic action are here picked up and elaborated. Music itself plays an important part in the dream, from the unearthly trumpet that sounds thrice to announce the opening of the ball to the triumphant wedding march at the end which somehow loses its head and whirls the dancing couples "through the walls as if the floor itself were rotating."

This short analysis of the dream episode in "A Kiss for Cinderella" seems to justify the claim that this scene is truly expressionistic. Subjectivity of form and matter is present throughout the scene, there is a fluidity of time and space, the persons tend to be types rather than characters, and dream logic pervades a series of incidents which are constructed on a musical scheme of contrapuntalism.

And if, as appears to be the case, "A Kiss

for Cinderella" is the first English play to contain such a fully expressionistic sequence, we can admire one more, perhaps unexpected, facet of Barrie's genius.

SOME CRIMES OF THE AMATEUR ACTOR

By Philip B. Barry

THE word "crimes" is here employed in the old Army sense meaning faults or blunders. Some of these things are done through ignorance of technique—some, through a casual attitude which does not believe in taking infinite pains.

Perhaps one of the deadliest of stage-crimes is the diversion of the audience's attention from the artist who is holding the stage. This is often done with the best intentions by an untutored actor trying to be conscientious. For example, if his companion is relating a story of horror, he believes that his own face must register every sort of horror-stricken response. Now, in real life, this might happen if he were a very sympathetic person, but in the theatre the trouble is that if he express too much sympathy by facial expression and gesture, the attention of the audience will doubtless wander from the actor speaking to the actor merely listening. In such a case all that is required is that the listener should remain absolutely still, his face registering interest, but *nothing more*.

One need hardly refer to the crime of being inaudible, for that is so obvious that comment is unnecessary though perhaps one may say without unkindness that many West End players are hardened "criminals" in this direction. It is probable that in some cases their inaudibility is due to lack of experience of theatres of different sizes. One of the chief advantages of the touring system is that the actor every Monday night has to study the pitch of his voice that he may adapt it to his new surroundings.

West End players on the other hand usually work in theatres more or less equally dimensioned, and so do not realise the advantages of a proper "pitch."

A very serious fault frequently committed by amateur actors is the dropping of the voice

SOME CRIMES OF THE AMATEUR ACTOR

at the end of the line. Now, some players find it very hard to avoid this tendency. Here then is a sort of rough remedy. Speak every line as if it had a note of interrogation at the end of it. Of course, this suggestion must not be taken *au pied de lettre*, otherwise every line would appear to emanate from Welsh lips! The writer means that if the actor when studying his part adopts this method, his voice will automatically respond to an inflection which will carry to all parts of the theatre.

Standing heavily on both feet except when a certain rigidity is required by the actual moment is another blunder. One foot should always be more or less half lifted, so that when a turn is made, the turn may be executed without a clumsy movement. Cinema actors have in this respect an easier task than stage actors, because practically every walk is interrupted by a sharp "cut." That is one of the reasons why raw beginners can often do quite well on the films, though they would present a terribly clumsy appearance on the theatre stage. Again, a complete turn should never be made in one movement. The effect from the front is appalling!

Another bad blunder seen too often in amateur productions is the misplaced position of the head. An actor standing down stage has to listen to a player standing up stage. Obsessed by the old absurd tradition that one must not turn one's back on the audience, he keeps his body square to the footlights, but twists round his head towards the speaker. In such a case, the proper method is to turn the body at least three-quarters away from the audience and direct the head in precisely the same manner which one would adopt in actual life.

Then there is the old old trouble of the hands. For no obvious reason, they creep behind the back—or they hover over the arm of a chair—or (this is perhaps the most frequent movement) they perch themselves akimbo on the hips! The writer once examined a photograph of a group of amateur players, twenty in number. Ten of them had their hands on that portion of their anatomies. Of course, the proper method when no definite gesture is indicated, is to allow the hands to rest lightly and naturally at the sides of the body, or to use an Army expression, they should be "at ease." Beware also of the temptation to conceal the hands behind the back. I have seen an actor playing a costermonger do this! Had he been playing a

University Don or a parson, the movement might have been justified, but although in real life, a costermonger of a thoughtful and meditative type *might* thus manipulate his hands, the stage costermonger should avoid doing it, for it is not in character!

This remark brings me to another "crime" committed sometimes by the professional as well as by the amateur. He sustains the character most of the time but not *all* the time. For example, playing a Frenchman, he maintains some sort of foreign accent quite nicely until the part demands some outbreak of anger or excitement. Suddenly, the English becomes almost perfect! This is not only artistically wrong—it is fundamentally wrong because a foreigner is never more foreign in his speech than when he is seized by emotion. And while on this subject of accent, let me say that when given a "dialect" part, the actor should not attempt to speak that dialect unless he can do it with some real ability. If he cannot, let him simply "roughen" his voice to suggest that he is not speaking B.B.C. English, otherwise, when playing an Irish part, he may find himself being complimented after the performance on his "marvellous Scottish brogue!"

There are, of course, other minor "crimes." "Masking" a fellow-player by standing wholly or partly in front of him is one of these crimes. Standing with a number of other actors in an unbroken line is another serious blunder, unless of course the producer for some good reason desires this effect. "Jumping-in" on a colleague's cues is also a very bad fault, though an even worse fault is a tendency to be too slow on them. Indeed, the "crimes" which the player is liable to commit are unfortunately too many to be included in the space of a short article, but the writer hopes that he has at least indicated some of the more elementary derelictions from the straight path of the good actor's road.

BOOK LIST ON SPEECH

The Speech Institute, 56, Gordon Square, London, W.C.1, has just compiled, for the National Book Council, a list of some 150 books on speech training, verse speaking and phonetics, which should be of interest and value to school teachers. Copies may be had for 3d. post free, from Mr. Clive Sansom, the Speech Fellowship and Institute, 56, Gordon Square, London, W.C.1.

PROMPTERS' PARADISE

A MOST unusual kind of meeting took place recently in the headquarters of the Pan-Russian Stage Society in Moscow. Moscow theatre prompters were gathered there to talk over their work, the professional qualities it requires, and how to get recruits.

Fifteen hundred prompters belong to the Association of Theatre Workers, "Rabis." Among them are veterans of the profession: Dolinov, oldest prompter of the Soviet Theatre who works at the Moscow Little Theatre and who this year celebrates half a century of work; Altschuller, of the Moscow Grand Opera, with 45 years of activity, who has been decorated by the Soviet Government for the loyal way he has carried out his duties; and Lebedev, another prompter with 45 years of work behind him. Compared with these, Darjalsky, with 30 years of work, seems a mere beginner. There was not one young prompter at the meeting, and it seems that there are no youngsters among Moscow prompters. This is just what perturbed those attending the meeting.

The old question cropped up: are prompters really necessary? In the speech

Yablochkina, People's Artist of the Soviet Union, made to this meeting, she examined in detail the various theories on this subject. She described the prompter's role in the theatre as that of the author's confidant, entrusted with safeguarding the original text. This fine actress instanced a number of cases from her own rich experience showing that—despite an excellent memory and a tip-top knowledge of the part—isolated words and even a whole sentence often slip the memory. This is when the prompter is called on to perform an extremely important task, for no genuine actor should allow himself to replace the author's text with words or phrases chosen on the spot. Such cases alone prove the need for a prompter, and their work should receive careful attention as should the finding of new blood for this profession.

Representatives of stage unions, the Actors' Club, and various actors also spoke. But the prompters themselves were the main speakers. A permanent commission of prompters has now been set up by the Union to go more thoroughly into the questions raised at the meeting and to elaborate plans for settling them.

COMPETITION FOR PHOTOGRAPHERS

IN last month's "Drama" Miss Mary Kelly commented on the prevailing low standard of photographs of amateur plays—"the stiffly arranged group of the company, with eyes starting out of their heads because of the flashlight, does not do the play justice, and the producer's soul is often wrung by the professional photographer, who, when a posed group has been arranged, tells the players to "Look this way, please, and look pleasant," just before he presses the bulb.

Amateur photographers often fall into the same trap, but, as the illustrations at page 96 of this issue show, there is really no need for this.

Mr. J. V. Alexander of the Oxford House Educational Settlement, Monmouth, comments on his print of "Sunday Costs Five Pesos" as follows:—"It was taken with a Contax—f.2. about three seconds ordinary stage lighting—but it could equally have been taken with a much cheaper camera. I believe the

secret lies in choosing at a rehearsal just that moment which is rather strong in action, and shows, as in this case, a rather pleasing sense of balance."

With a view to encouraging a proper sense of artistic ambition among amateur photographers, we offer a prize of Two Guineas for the best photograph of an interior scene with figures showing the play in action, taken by a bona-fide amateur.

Competitors may send in as many prints as they please, and should write on the back of each, particulars of the play with a brief indication of the time of exposure, stop, and any other technical detail which they think would be interesting. Amateur development is not obligatory. Entries must be received not later than the first post on Wednesday, April 12th. The Editor's decision will be final, and he will retain the right of reproduction in "Drama" of any of the prints entered.

BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE NOTES



THE JOURNAL OF
THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE
INCORPORATING
THE VILLAGE DRAMA SOCIETY

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LORD HOWARD DE WALDEN

Chairman of the Council:

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Neither the Editor nor the Drama League as a whole accept any responsibility for the opinions expressed in signed articles printed in this Journal.

THE death of Mr. W. B. Yeats may be said to close a dramatic epoch, for although the Abbey Theatre of Dublin is still active, and shows every promise of continuous life, Mr. Yeats was the most prominent survivor of the group which founded the theatre and set the first standard which has certainly never been surpassed by a later generation. It is significant that most of the writers who have paid tribute in the press to the life-work of Yeats have concentrated on his contribution to poetry rather than to drama, and it may well be that so far as the written word goes it is as a poet that he will ultimately be best remembered. For our part we honour him as the playwright of "The Shadowy Waters" and "Cathleen ni Houlihan" and also as a Man of the Theatre with a strong practical sense of theatre management. Is it possible that Mr. Ashley Dukes at the Mercury Theatre might follow up his successful revival of "The Playboy of the Western World" with a bill of plays by W. B. Yeats?

We also regret to record the death of M. André Mauprey, who may not have been known to many of our readers, but whose

work as Secretary of the Société Universelle du Théâtre made him an important figure in the European theatre. M. Mauprey, in what must have been an extremely difficult task, showed that modesty and self-effacement which actually enabled him to deal with his team of internationals in a way which would have been otherwise impossible. To him is due in large measure the survival of the Société Universelle in a world of political clash which has been, these last few years, little conducive to peaceful consultation between the nations even on a purely theatrical plane. We are glad to think that the last conference which he helped to organise took place in this country, during which his active geniality gave no hint of the all too speedy curtailment of his career.

Provisional arrangements are well ahead for the Annual Conference of the League which is to be held this year at Birmingham on the last week-end in October, under the auspices of the Birmingham Amateur Dramatic Federation. The Sub-Committee dealing with this matter is most anxious to make the Conference an enjoyable and memorable one, and on the first evening a public dinner is to be held, at which Lord Bessborough has kindly consented to speak. We are always glad to welcome old friends at the Conference, but have sometimes felt that the newer members of the League may not be aware how enjoyable and inspiring such events can be. We suggest that, even thus early, members make a note of the date, October 27th—29th.

Miss Athene Seyler, who is now playing with Emlyn Williams in "The Corn is Green," is to open the School on Comedy which the League is running at Easter, in London. Interesting discussion is sure to arise out of the syllabus, as there has always been much controversy regarding the difficulties and merits of Comedy for amateurs. Other special speakers at the School are Mr. Ernest Thesiger on "The Acting of Comedy," with special reference to Period Comedy; and "Wee Georgie Wood" on "The Technique of the Variety Artist." Mr. W. A. Darlington and Mr. F. Sladen-Smith will deal with the Writing of Comedy, and a series of classes in Comedy Production and Acting will be under the direction of Mr. Dennis Arundell and Mr. John Fernald.

RECENT BOOKS

Reviewed by F. Sladen-Smith

- "Dramatic Criticism." By S. R. Littlewood. Pitman. 10s. 6d.
 "Shakespeare's Boy Actors." By W. Robertson Davies. Dent. 10s. 6d.
 "Adventures Among Immortals." By Percy Burton as told to Lowell Thomas. Hutchinson. 12s. 6d.
 "Problems of Acting and Play Production." By Edwin C. White. Pitman. 7s. 6d.
 "Dressing the Part." By Fairfax Proudfit Walkup. Harrap. 18s.
 "Rude Mechanicals." By Nora Ratcliff. Nelson.
 25. "Gas Light." By Patrick Hamilton. Constable.
 25. 6d.
 "Queen for a Year." By Armitage Owen. French.
 25. "The Lost Heir." By Averil Bernard. Deane. 2s.
 "Knit One, Purl One." By Gertrude Jennings. French. 1s.
 "Tea at the Vicarage" and "Lassies and Lads." By Suzanne Stone. French. 1s.

THE cover of Mr. Littlewood's "Dramatic Criticism," contains a statement that it is "perhaps the most comprehensive survey of dramatic criticism that has yet been published," and, after a careful study of the volume, one is bound to confess that this is scarcely the usual exaggeration. The book is surprisingly comprehensive; hardly any facet of the complex subject of criticism is left untouched. At first it might appear that a general history of drama had been undertaken, so many details are given of the origins of theatre, and of the Greek, Roman, Mediæval, Elizabethan, Restoration and Georgian stage, but these details are seen to be necessary for the searching analysis of criticism which is the basis of the book. In this section, nothing pleased the present reviewer more than the chapter on Shakespeare, where the author demonstrates that despite a few mysteries the man Shakespeare stands out clearly in his work; a human being we can recognise and love. "Why worry further?" asks Mr. Littlewood, adding "yet over a thousand books have been written to prove that Shakespeare was not Shakespeare." And, we would add, apparently a thousand more are going to be written to prove that in any case he couldn't possibly have meant what he so obviously said. When Mr. Littlewood comes to our own time, the book becomes still more interesting—gone, indeed, are the days when the more the critic could write the better; how often now are we given that "short paragraph, telephoned after the first act, and corrected for a later edition if the prophecy has proved entirely wrong." No prospect is held out of a decent living being obtained from dramatic criticism—although there are journalists who would not object to the £10 a week which Mr. Littlewood (speaking of William Archer) considers a pittance. But it is refreshing to find that the author, after so many years work (amounting, at times, to drudgery), can still write with an infectious, and even profound, enthusiasm for the profession he most certainly adorns.

The fact that boy actors, apparently successfully, portrayed the great Shakespearian heroines has been considered rather extraordinary by some people, but

Mr. W. Robertson Davies, in his book "Shakespeare's Boy Actors," endeavours to prove that Shakespeare's women are really very simple creatures compared with the men, who usually bear the main burden, and well suited to the powers of intelligent boys or youths, especially those born in the Shakespearian age. Most of us will agree with the author when he deals with the early comedies, or even, perhaps, with parts such as Portia, Rosalind, Viola, or Beatrice, but when we come to the tragedies he is on less safe ground. We may give slightly unwilling assent to the statement that, possessing enthusiasm and technique, a boy would not have much trouble with Juliet, but not everyone will follow Mr. Davies when he says "Lady Macbeth presents few difficulties in performance," or "the role of Cleopatra is well within the technical and emotional scope of a boy of sixteen or seventeen." An interesting section of the book is devoted to the elderly women in Shakespeare, both comic and tragic, who, of course, would be taken by older boys. While much in the book remains controversial, we heartily agree that it is much easier and more effective to act with Shakespeare than against him, as some modern players seem out to do, and also with the condemnation of the habit of giving Oberon, Puck and Ariel to women, when, in this case, at least, youths are infinitely better in the parts.

"Adventures Among Immortals," as told by Mr. Percy Burton to Mr. Lowell Thomas, is one more volume of theatrical reminiscences. A better man for this particular type of book could hardly be found than Mr. Burton, manager and representative of stars of the calibre of Irving, Tree, Wyndham, Forbes-Robertson, Wilson Barrett, Sarah Bernhardt and Eleanora Duse, and, naturally, we are given innumerable anecdotes about these and many other well-known people—such as Shaw, Ellen Terry, Lawrence of Arabia, or the Schubert brothers of America. The book is not particularly distinguished in style (and several venerable jokes have no business to make one more appearance), but some of the scenes described are memorable—the frozen horror of a state performance at Windsor, with the ex-Kaiser as chief guest and King Edward in a gloomy mood—the equable Sir John Hare kicking a silver dish-cover and two rashers of bacon across the room, shouting "I will NOT play Sheffield!"—Eleanora Duse found wandering on the Embankment while a full house waited her appearance. For all his conviction that "high-brow drama is a luxury for rich and independant managers," Mr. Burton is well aware of fustian when he encounters it, and has no illusions about some of the plays in whose success he had a share—in contrast, he once lost £3,000 through unfortunate play selection. At the end we leave him still an optimist; and it is a good, but not really a surprising thing, that a man whose knowledge and experience was gained in days very different from the present, would remain convinced that "the stage proper with its flesh and blood interpreters, will never die."

Mr. Edwin C. White, in "Problems of Acting and Play Production," has written a useful book; not especially inspiring, but full of excellent advice for the amateur actor and producer. The chapters on acting include movement, gesture, the voice, interpretation, entrances; and for the producer, settings, grouping

RECENT BOOKS

and movement, purpose and climax (how true it is that amateurs have little sense of climax), and rehearsing. There is also a chapter on play choosing, with a glossary of plays at the end. Mr. White while conscious of modern movements in the theatre, does rather less than justice to recent developments of lighting and decor, although he admits they have their place; for him, and rightly so, the actor is the supreme artist in the theatre. At the close of each chapter there is a summary, and somewhat elaborate exercises. Miss Flora Robson writes a foreword.

Another large book on costume; this time from America; "Dressing the Part" by Mrs. Fairfax Proudfoot Walkup, of the School of the Theatre, Pasadena Community playhouse. Like most other books on the subject, it progresses from Ancient Egypt onwards, the costume of each period being dealt with under headings such as General Characteristics, Military and Ecclesiastical Dress, Underclothes, Footwear, Hairdressing, Ornaments, Make-up and any special details. There are also suggestions for modern adaptation, one of the most valuable being the description of making chain mail on page 105. Each chapter begins with a summary of important events and people. We are warned in the foreword that the authoress has come to her subject through the teaching of history, and, indeed, history when at all colourful, appears to go to Mrs. Walkup's head. "The Renaissance was not an event, but an ecstasy," is short and not unpleasing, but more typical is "a tavern loiterer named Shakespeare caught the imagination of man in the net of God's infinity," or the later "the speed limit of the automobile was exceeded by the rumble-seat petters; gin was no sin." The illustrations are well enough drawn to be useful, but are not particularly distinguished examples of draughtsmanship.

"Rude Mechanicals" by Mrs. Nora Ratcliff (No. 8 of the Nelson Discussion books) is a treatise on village drama which could be read with interest by all connected with the amateur theatre, although it deals with specifically village problems. As Mrs. Ratcliff points out, play choosing in a village is even more difficult than usual, as there are frequently questions of dialect, and nearly always a censorship of church, gentry, and village opinion—and the greatest of these is village opinion. Mrs. Ratcliff sees little use in the dialect play as printed, preferring plays to be written "straight" and the local idiom added by the company—and there is much sound sense in this. She also deplores the triviality of most village plays, while disliking attempts at West End drama (some of the V.D.S. reports in last month's "Drama" must have astonished her as much as they did us); she is all for a village devising its own play from some simple theme—but the theme suggested on page 81 would ill suit the Mrs. Grundy mentioned on page 84. Most problems of village drama seem touched upon, including staging and finance, and always there is a keen sensitive humour and breadth of outlook (even in a chapter on festivals!) which make the book very pleasant to read.

The most original feature of Mr. Patrick Hamilton's "Gas Light," a Victorian thriller in three (short) acts, is the ingenious use of the typical incandescent gas lighting of Victorian days to increase both atmosphere and excitement. It is not an especially thrilling thriller, and much is left unexplained, but there are good parts for the sadistic murderer, Mr. Manningham, the hysterical Mrs. Manningham (whose exultation over

Manningham's downfall has an Old Testament ferocity), the brusque but golden-hearted ex-Detective Rough, and the two, contrasting, maids, Elizabeth and Nancy.

In "Queen for a Year" (9 men, 10 women, 3 acts), Mr. Armitage Owen has a good theme at his disposal—the young, working-class girl who becomes the Beauty Queen run by an enterprising newspaper, and her subsequent adventures, both in circles somewhat different from her own, and as an embryo film star, and her return, disillusioned, to the arms of the steady young man, who, we all knew, would be waiting. But the treatment seems unworthy of the author, especially the absurd scene in the house of the M.P., and, although the humour is often telling and the parts very playable, we feel that an opportunity for a striking play has been lost in the endeavour to write the sort of comedy now expected of Mr. Owen.

"The Lost Heir" by Miss Averil Bernard, is an interesting novelty. It is a play (mainly designed for production in village halls) written in the style of the 18th century ballad operas—that is, at any moment the characters (8 men, 7 women, and a chorus) break out into songs written to fit simple well-known melodies. It begins in excellent style, but becomes needlessly elaborate in construction considering its four acts are little more than scenes. Nevertheless, at the end the lost heir and the lost wig are found, and the curtain falls on an appropriate spectacle of united lovers and rejoicing villagers.

"Knit One, Purl One," is a serviceable little one-act comedy by Miss Gertrude Jennings, with an all-women cast of 15 (two of these are children). Some incriminating letters, hidden in a writing case which, in turn, is hidden in the Lucky Tub at a Sale of Work, make a mildly exciting situation, but as was to be expected, both characterisation and dialogue have a point and finish that lifts the play above average work of this type.

"Tea at the Vicarage" (3 men, 8 women) and "Lassies and Lads" (3 men, 8 women) are two mime plays devised by Miss Suzanne Stone. Probably "Lassies and Lads," with its mimed folk songs will be the more popular (especially Uncle Cobby's famous mare), but the Victorian humour of the Vicarage tea, with its added excitements of croquet, photography, and an engagement, should prove effective. The mimes have plenty of ingenious detail, the music is easily obtainable, and both can be performed in the open air.

THREE OPEN SCHOLARSHIPS

The following Scholarships are being offered by the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, John Carpenter Street, Victoria Embankment, London, E.C.4.

A Corporation Scholarship, value £40 for Elocution.

A Corporation Scholarship, value £30 for Viola or Violin.

The Arthur Lysaght Nunn Memorial Scholarship, value £50 for Violoncello.

Applicants must be under 21 years of age for the Elocution Scholarship, and under 19 for the two instrumental Scholarships.

* Forms of Entry for all the above are to be obtained from the Secretary and returned by 11th March, 1939.

W. P. WADDINGTON, M.A.,
Secretary.

THE THEATRE IN HOLLAND

By Ben Albach

IN contradistinction to the London—and largely also the Paris—theatre, “long-run” showing is, in Holland, the exception, not the rule. The two chief theatrical centres are the municipal repertory theatres at The Hague and Amsterdam. At these theatres, the so-called “vaste bespellers” (regular companies of players) appointed by the municipal authorities, give their performances. The Amsterdam municipal theatre (“Stadschouwburg”), founded exactly three centuries ago, has the oldest traditions. A remarkable custom in connection with this theatre is the annual performance, every New Year’s day, of the classical tragedy “Gijsbrecht van Aemstel” by the national poet Vondel, i.e., the play with which the building was inaugurated in 1638.

All Dutch producers of note have, at one time or another, and each in his own way and according to his own stylistic conception, attempted to give the correct interpretation of “Gijsbrecht van Aemstel.” The play has recently been re-staged entirely anew, in modern setting to celebrate the fact that this classic drama had been on the repertoire without interruption for three centuries. The tercentenary of the playhouse itself will one of these days be celebrated with a special gala performance, planned as a reconstruction of the “old-Dutch” theatre.

A short time ago a new troupe called “Het Nederlandsch Tooneel” (“The Netherlands Stage”) was appointed to the Amsterdam municipal theatre as “regular players,” under the direction of Cor van der Lugt Melsert. The “inner circle” of this company had already been playing at Amsterdam, under the style of “The Amsterdam Dramatic Society,” and under the leadership of Albert van Dalum and A. Defresne; and it has earned a great reputation for its modern productions of the “Beggar’s Opera,” “Crime and Punishment,” Gogol’s “The Revisor”; O’Neill’s “Days without End”; “Phaea” (by the German expressionist Von Unruh); Shakespeare (“Othello,” “Macbeth”); Shaw (“Back to Methuselah,” “St. Joan,” “Pygmalion”), etc. Among the works of Netherlands origin performed by this company we may mention in particular the “flying” drama

“B.21”; “The Spanish Brothers” (based on the tragedy of the Spanish civil war), and “Van de Vos Reinaarde” (Reynard the Fox)—a modern stage adaptation of a medieval Dutch tale. The present leader of the Amsterdam municipal company, Mr. Van der Lugt Melsert, was for 20 years the leading actor-producer on the stage at The Hague, where he gave an extremely variegated repertoire, e.g., works by Shakespeare, Shaw, Molière, Molnar, Hauptmann, Priestly, etc., and, of course, also Dutch original works, both classics, and modern plays by Heyermans, Fabricius, Verman, Van Eysselesteyn, and Den Hertog.

The most interesting performances of “The Netherlands Stage” are those of the remarkable play by Brian Doherty, “Father Malachy’s Miracle” and especially, their truly monumental production of Schiller’s “Don Carlos.” The ideal of freedom, which had also inspired Goethe to his dramatization of a *motif* from the Low Countries’ struggle for freedom in the 16th century, (i.e., in “Egmont”) lends an added topical interest to Schiller’s drama at the present time, especially as regards Holland.

A more intimate form of drama is presented, notably at the “Centraal Tooneel.” The director of the company playing at this house is that very fine actor-producer Cees Laseur (who, by the way, has also performed in London with conspicuous success, in “Festival Time”). His company—the only one in Holland that goes in for “series” (runs)—gives exceedingly well-finished performances of modern American, French and English plays. By dint of years of careful training, Mr. Laseur has succeeded in establishing great cohesion and a spirit of unity in this excellent *ensemble*, which consists for the most part of young actors and actresses. Their productions, “The First Legion,” “Men in white,” Achard’s “Petrus,” Shakespeare’s “As you like it,” and, quite recently, “Golden Boy,” are to be reckoned among the best achievements on the Dutch stage in the last few years.

On the occasion of Queen Wilhelmina’s Jubilee in September last, various theatrical companies were showing plays giving expression to the historical bonds between the

THE THEATRE IN HOLLAND

Orange dynasty and the Dutch people. Thus, the "Centraal Tooneel" did a play in the Shakespearian vein, and on a historical theme, entitled "Eenheid door Oranje" (United in Orange) in which the popular Prince William III—later King of England—was the central figure.

The Hague theatre, too, took part in the Jubilee celebrations. At the "Royal Theatre" the "Residentietooncel" (Residential troupe, so named because the Hague is the residence of the Queen), directed by Dirk Verbeek, has been playing since September, 1938, and this company opened its season with an interesting Dutch play, "1813," which has as its subject the deliverance of the Netherlands from the dictatorship of Napoleon, and the recalling, from London, of the Prince of Orange, later King William I of Holland, and great-grandfather of the present Queen. The "Residentietooncel" also seems to be very interested in English plays. Its greatest success is the lovely, colourful and amusing production of "The School for Scandal."

In addition to the above-mentioned, there are a number of companies without a "permanent home," such as "Het Masker" ("The Mask"), starring Elsa Mauhs—Holland's greatest actress, and without the slightest doubt one of the greatest artists of our time. The extremely refined subtlety with which this actress knows how to build up a role makes it live down to the smallest detail. The fine dignity of her appearance, her always graceful gesture, her expressive facial acting have their own quite peculiar style. Elsa Mauhs was an unexcelled Norah, a deeply-moving Queen Elizabeth, (in André Josset's play), and a delightfully charming Russian princess in "Tovarich."

The amateur stage flourishes healthily in Holland. Young people of the most widely-divergent religious and political persuasions, perform plays, generally of a symbolic character, specially written for their purpose by kindred spirits. Very often, these plays are staged on quite modern lines. It is, however, the students of the different universities (Amsterdam, Leyden, Utrecht, Delft and Groningen) who most specially present plays, of an experimental nature. Before the war, the "lustrum"—(five-yearly) celebrations at the universities were confined to some pageant or other; later, however, an attempt

was made to create big spectacles with some deeper significance, and usually performed *al fresco*. These performances have gained in importance ever since the production, at Delft (1923) of the symbolic play "De Torenbestormer" (The Stormer of the Tower).

Generally, the theme of these plays contains some wide humanitarian ideal, or some topical *motif* of universal interest, presented frequently in a very fine manner, sumptuously staged, and with large and imposing "crowd-work." Thus, in 1928, the students of the Delft Technical University produced a stupendous play, "Man Versus Machine"—in the Meyerhold manner and under the stage-direction of Albert van Dalsum; and in the summer of this year, the same group produced a satirical fantasy, written around the figure of "Jan Klaassen" (the Dutch "Punch"). Students of the other universities have also given plays based upon historical, symbolic or allegoric themes. Apart from these special open air performances, university students regularly introduce experimental works in one theatre or another.

Unfortunately, attendances have decreased of late years—partly, no doubt, owing to economic causes. Rotterdam, for instance, once one of the most important centres of the naturalistic stage—does not now possess even one theatrical company of its own. Various companies however, perform regularly at Rotterdam, chiefly in the excellently-appointed "Groote Schouwburg" (Grand Theatre).

Many of the smaller towns possess very fine theatres. At Arnheim, for instance, an altogether charming theatre was inaugurated recently, whilst in Utrecht a new theatre is in course of construction.

But the most gratifying evidence of the ever-growing popular interest in the art of the stage is the great activity displayed by the amateur theatrical societies.

NEW RELEASES

"The Magic Cupboard" (6m., 2w.) by Percy Walsh, and "Doctor—There's Danger" (6m., 1w.) by Falkland L. Cary, have recently been published by Messrs. Samuel French. Each play has a performing royalty of three guineas.

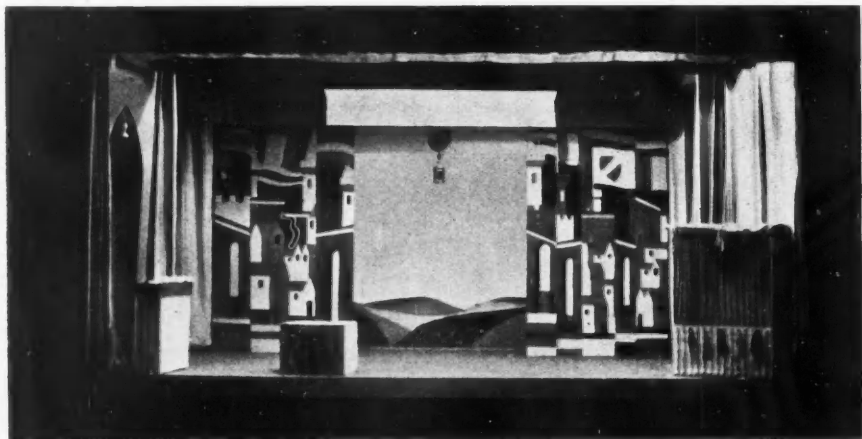
CANADIAN DRAMA FESTIVAL

Mr. S. R. Littlewood has been appointed Adjudicator to the coming Drama Festival in Canada.



SCENE FROM THE SATIRICAL OPEN-AIR
PLAY "OM DE DOOIE DOOD NIET OF JAN
KLAASSEN KOMT NAAR HUIS," BY JAN
ENGELMAN, AS PERFORMED BY THE
STUDENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF DELFT
IN JULY, 1938. (PRODUCER PAUL STORM.)

On the Market Place stood a huge puppet
theatre, upon which the above scene,
in the manner of a puppet-show was
played. The funeral scene of Death
with the undertakers belongs to the tradi-
tions of the old popular "Jan Klaassen"
puppet play.



SETTING FOR ACT II. "MOUNTEBANKS"
BY FRANK BIRCH, FROM THE DESIGN BY
JAMES HENDERSON FOR THE RECENT
PRODUCTION AT THE LITTLE THEATRE,
HEBDEN BRIDGE.

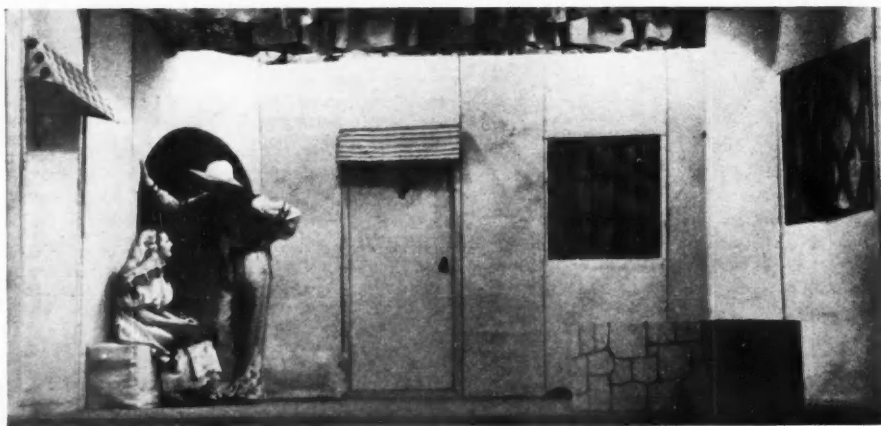


Photo: J. V. Alexander.

SCENE FROM "SUNDAY COSTS FIVE PESOS"
BY JOSEPHINA NIGGLI, AS PRODUCED BY
THE OXFORD HOUSE PLAYERS IN THE
MONMOUTHSHIRE DRAMA FESTIVAL, 1938.

NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

WATERFORD DRAMATIC SOCIETY

The Waterford Dramatic Society—now in its fourth season—produced J. B. Priestley's "Laburnum Grove" at the Theatre Royal, Waterford, on 5th, 6th and 7th December. There was a very good attendance which increased each night. As in previous years, the production was in the hands of Mrs. E. V. Fleming-Moran, to whom a tribute is due for her excellent casting of the play. Perhaps the favourite character with the audience was Bernard Baxley, played by Mr. R. N. Sharpe, who got the very last ounce of humour out of the part.

The play was very well received. As one outside the cast I found it interesting to mix with the audience and pick up chance remarks. I could not help seeing, however, that there was a sense of disappointment at the ending of the play. I heard such remarks as "What an abrupt ending!" "This isn't the final curtain surely." It would be interesting to know if any other amateurs who have produced this play have had the same experience.

(Mrs.) MAUREEN DEVLIN,
Hon. Secretary.

"1066 AND ALL THAT"

Miss Rose Lloyd-King, Producer of the Watford Repertory Company, which is affiliated to the Watford School of Music, must be congratulated on her courage in undertaking to stage so large a production as "1066 and all that."

One of the special features of the production was its excellent continuity and the twenty-five scenes were played with practically no waits.

Although there were three performances before packed houses, it is hoped that she will be able to repeat it in the near future.

"CANDLE TO A SAINT"

Miss Molly Veness, whom we are glad to welcome back after several years, gave a delightful programme at the Gayton Rooms, Harrow, on Monday, December 19th, which included a play written and produced by Miss Veness herself entitled "Candle to a Saint," a simple and pathetic little scene. This was followed by the Coventry Nativity Play curtailed and arranged by Miss Veness, in which the simplicity of the setting and the earnestness of the excellent company, combined to produce a most sympathetic rendering.

ST. ROGER'S FOLK

St. Roger's Folk in "Fishpingle" by H. A. Vachell finished their tour of Chelmsford and villages on February 8th at Ingatstone. The play has proved of wide and absorbing appeal to varied audiences, and the cast has met with general approval. The company's usual weather-luck has deserted it, players and listeners have had to negotiate fog, storms, floods and snow, and in one of the largest halls the whole three-act play had to be performed by candle-light, as the snow had brought down the electricity wires. Accidents and illness too have attacked the actors, and twice only has the original cast appeared. Fortunately talented understudies were available.

The play was produced by Mrs. Gregory Nicholson.

UNNAMED SOCIETY PLAYS "TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA" IN A PUBLIC HOUSE.

A new experiment as far as the North of England is concerned, took place at the Yew Tree Inn, Northenden, recently, when the Manchester Unnamed Society presented "Two Gentlemen of Verona," the play produced by Mr. Frank Sladen-Smith.

The sponsors of the movement are the Committee for Verse and Prose Recitation in Public Houses. The experiment has been repeated several times in the south and west of England. When the Unnamed Society was approached to produce a play for the Committee, they chose the "Two Gentlemen" principally because the Society had presented it but a short time before at their Little Theatre in Lomax Street.

Interesting though the play was, I found myself studying the audience. Upon it, I felt, depended the success or failure of the Committee's aims.

Somehow, the people with whom I sat, did not strike me as being regular habitués. Were they those who visited the establishment for about an hour or so each night, and argued about politics and discussed their gardens and wireless sets, or were they (the majority at any rate) people who had come specially to see this particular innovation, and then would be seen no more, unless they chanced to be passing at some future date in the summer, when they might call in for a "quick one"?

I thought of all the cars outside—and I remembered the people I had seen jumping off the buses, and converging on the "Yew Tree." But what about old Mr. Smith who has lived in Northenden all his life, or young Mr. Brown who has just married and settled in one of the new suburban houses in the district? Were they in that audience, too, or—were they playing a lone game of darts in the privacy of their homes?

However, when asked if further performances would be welcomed, there was a loud cry of "Yes" from the "auditorium" so that presumably all was well.

JOAN RILEY.

NOTTINGHAM PLAYGOERS CLUB

Professor Janko Lavrin delivered a most stimulating lecture to the Playgoers' Club on Monday, January 23rd—"The Crisis in the Modern Theatre."

The speaker held his audience by his sincerity and wide knowledge of the continental theatre. He emphasised most strongly the need for state supported theatres in England such as were in existence in the majority of towns in Russia, Jugo-Slavia and Czecho-Slovakia.

He deplored the passing of the creative theatre, and viewed with dismay the commercialised theatre that is forced to meet the cinema on its own ground and finds the competition almost too great to face.

Although he acknowledges its potential possibilities, Professor Lavrin in common with Mr. St John Ervine has little good to say of the modern film. Throughout his lecture he pleaded earnestly for the establishment of the National Theatre.

JOSEPHINE FYFFE.

NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

"THE BRIDAL CROWN"

On January 25th and 26th at the Twentieth Century Theatre, the Baber Repertory Company gave the first performances in England of Strindberg's play "The Bridal Crown." It is a folk play in six scenes, set in the Swedish Province of Dalecarlia in the 1860's. It is the story of a village girl, her love for a miller's son, a child born out of wedlock and the loss of "the bridal crown," a story of love, fear, hate and repentance against a background of superstition, folklore and a village life that is haunted still by the Neck, the Mewler, the Mockler, yet is driven by an almost Puritanical sense of religion.

The Baber Repertory Company gave a faithful portrayal of the drama, but I think they missed a great chance of a symbolical production. Instead, with a meticulous attention to detail, they dressed the stage according to textbook, until the eye was weary and the waits between the scenes drew the performance on interminably. But the acting was good, the right atmosphere there, and they are to be congratulated on introducing us to a fresh Scandinavian drama.

H. M. G.

SINGAPORE

The Singapore Scene-Shifters have recently staged another successful play, "The Truth about Blayds" at the Victoria Theatre. The cast of eight people worked excellently, and Mr. Rowland Lyne can be proud of his work as producer and of the eager helpers who assisted him in creating a finished presentation of A. A. Milne's clever play.

The dramatic society of the Y.M.C.A. of Singapore, known as the Scene-Shifters, was founded in January 1933, by Mr. Roy Bower, Mr. Rowland Lyne, and a group who had previously been associated in the production of "Prunella" and "The Fourth Wall" in the Y.M.C.A. Hall. So successful was the inaugural production of four One-Act Plays that the Society was encouraged to go forward along the lines of the Little Theatres in England and America as a purely amateur group with the aim of fostering the dramatic arts, paying particular attention to experimental drama. The society has had various vicissitudes, mainly in regard to a suitable hall in which to produce its plays. However, it still looks forward to the time when it can present the more usual type of dramatic production in its own "Little Theatre."

The Scene-Shifters is definitely a part of the Y.M.C.A. of Singapore, and has the full recognition of the Board of Directors. It has behind it, therefore, the organisation and the ideals of a well-known movement which has been an integral part of the life of this city since 1902.

CAMBRIDGE

On February 4th and 5th the Cambridge University Spanish and French Societies performed three times in the A.D.C. Theatre, Cambridge, Gil Vicente's early sixteenth century "Auto da Sibilla Cassandra" and Maeterlinck's "Le Miracle de St. Antoine."

Camille Prior, whose productions of plays, pageants (notably Pageants of English Music), operas, and oratorios treated operatically have of late years won her a more than local reputation, scored another success in the quaint Spanish play... setting, speech,

acting, and music alike being most effective. She scored as an actress in the most responsible part, perhaps, in the story of St. Anthony... her mingled common-sense, *naïveté* and piety, with the detached, yet insistent, resolution of the "saint" (played by Jacques Price) giving to the whole production the right tone and atmosphere. The producer, Donald Beves, tackled successfully the difficult problem of the second scene, where, in the death chamber, a mobile crowd of minor yet significant characters—the protagonists in the controversy as to the "miracle"—and Mlle. Hortense herself—dead, restored to life, and dead again, must all be kept simultaneously yet in different degrees within the consciousness of the spectator.

Not every society has the linguistic resources needed for such performances; but—where they are available—both plays are very well worth doing.

ARTHUR MERRIDEW.

ACCRINGTON

The Arts Club at Accrington in Lancashire has just moved into its new premises, which are placed in the upper part of the large building of the Liberal Club in that town. The new headquarters consist in the main of a large hall for concerts and lectures and an intimate theatre which holds about 200 people. The combination of hall and theatre is very happy. The hall provides extra space for rehearsals and can also be used for exhibitions.

The Accrington Arts Club is an offshoot of the 30 year old Accrington Amateur Dramatic Society whose work was sadly disturbed by the advent of the "Talkies" which stole the theatre where the A.A.D.S. regularly played. For the past three years the Arts Club has entered for the Blackpool Drama Festival, securing fourth place in the awards on two occasions and second place in a One-Act Festival.

Some while ago a special meeting of the Club was held and all were agreed that no progress could be made until a theatre for the exclusive use of the Club could be secured. A Committee was formed of local enthusiasts for various forms of artistic activity. A distinguished list of Patrons was drawn up, with a guarantee fund of £1,000.

Actually so far £1,300 has been spent on the theatre and clubroom. The lighting system was installed by the Strand Electric Company. There are two large dressing rooms for the male and female members of the companies. There is a large workroom where Mr. Noel Hellewell, the Club's Stage Manager and a willing "gang" of 10 members are busy almost every night on the constructions of sets, designed by Miss Dorothy Taylor, and the necessary carpentering thereto.

Chairman of the Club is Mr. A. Edward Higham, who with other members of his family has been greatly responsible for the success of the Accrington Arts Club.

There are nearly 500 members and in the four months of the new theatre's existence there has been produced Mr. Shaw's "Pygmalion," under the direction of Miss Ida Shaw, responsible for many Lancashire amateur play and pageant ventures (this was awarded third prize at the Blackpool D.F. in November last); a mock-Victorian melodrama, and in March there is being held a One-Act Play Competition, open as regards the writing, acting and production to members only. Other events before the season closes include the

NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

presentation of two full-length plays, each to run a week, as well as several play reading and instructional classes for beginners. The object of the Club is "to supply at a reasonable cost a means of intelligent recreation for those interested in drama, music and literature." There are weekly Musical Evenings and Spelling Bees, Debates and Lectures among the literary activities.

Full membership for the three Sections of the Arts Club costs £1 1 0 and those on this full subscription basis are allowed a rebate on tickets for public drama productions and priority of booking.

GERALD MORICE.

PICKERING

In April, 1938, the Pickering (Yorkshire) Women's Institute Drama Team entered the Yorkshire Federation of Women's Institutes Drama Competition at York with Barrie's play "The Old Lady shows her Medals," and gained second place in Class IV with 91 marks. Although the Producer and some of the team were absolute novices, Miss Gwen Lally (adjudicator) praised the production most highly, and awarded the team a first class certificate.

'PHONES TAKE THE CUE

Loudspeaker 'phones similar to those used by business executives to communicate with their staff have now taken the place of the traditional "call-boy" in summoning stage stars to take their cue.

At Sadlers Wells the installation of the first telephone "call-boy" has just been completed. Twenty-two loudspeaker telephones controlled by a master panel and loudspeaker enable the stage manager to issue instructions to every member or the cast, together or singly. A flick of a switch sets the apparatus in action.

Each loudspeaker looks like a miniature radio set. One is fixed to the wall of every dressing room and key-point back-stage. Without raising his voice the stage manager can be heard as clearly in each room as if he were actually present.

By using a volume control on the master panel he can, if necessary, amplify his voice to a roar, or reduce it to a whisper. The artists can answer in normal tones without leaving their dressing tables, as each loudspeaker is both a receiver and a transmitter.

The loudspeaker 'phones are so sensitive that ordinary conversations going on in each room are picked up and heard on the main control loudspeaker.

ESSEX DRAMA SCHOOL

A Drama School organised by the Drama Committee of the Essex Rural Community Council was held in the Village Hall at Boreham on Saturday, under the conductorship of Mr. George Makin, of the Derbyshire R.C.C.

Village Dramatic Societies turned up in force from the surrounding villages of Hatfield Peveral, Wickham Bishops, Little Baddow, and even as far afield as Abridge, Takeley and Willingale.

Including the above Societies there were over 100 Village Actors and Actresses with their Producers present. Small parties of individuals came from the villages of Boreham, Gt. Baddow, and Hawkwell as well as a number of Producers from Chelmsford and Colchester.

Mrs. Gregory Nicholson, the Vice-Chairman of the Committee, in introducing the Conductor, said that the flourishing condition of Drama in Derbyshire was due to a great extent to the work done by Mr. Makin in that County. Drama was a fine art and should be approached with reverence and discrimination. Nothing was so boring as acting badly done and badly produced and she welcomed this large and enthusiastic audience.

Mr. Makin explained how an adequate make-up outfit could be built up for 5s., and demonstrated straight make-up for fair and dark men and women. After tea he gave a personal demonstration of many character make-ups altering his appearance with lightning rapidity. He pointed out, however, that paint and powder were only aids to character make-up and that experience and carriage played an even greater part in forming a "character."

THE GINNER MAWER SCHOOL

The well-known actress, Miss May Agate, will adjudicate at the Dramatic Examination Performances by students of the Ginner Mawer School of Dance and Drama in their rehearsal theatre at Philbeach Hall, S.W.5, on Thursday, March 9th and Friday, March 10th.

An interesting range of plays will include scenes from "Prometheus Bound" (Æschylus), "Viceroy Sarah," "Four Plays of St. Clare," "Twelfth Night," "Fresh Fields," "Victoria Regina." The productions are by Miss Irene Mawer and Miss Joyce Ruscoe. Invitations are available on application to the Secretary, Ginner Mawer School of Dance and Drama.

It is the aim of this group to show that by a balanced study of speech, mime and dance, even inexperienced actors can give a rendering of a play of any period which is pleasing to both eye and ear. All students taking part have just finished a fortnight's run in the Ballet arranged by Miss Ruby Ginner for the production of "Faust" at the Royal Albert Hall.

THE TORCH THEATRE

This very Little Theatre in Wilton Place, Knightsbridge, London, has recently come under the management of Mr. Gerald Cooper, and his first production, "Girdle Round the Earth," by Margaret Love, augurs well for the future. Three airmen are engaged in a dangerously experimental world flight. The wife of one, the mother of another, the fiancée of the third, sit awaiting their return in a villa at Croydon. The material may seem slight, but it suffices for a very moving little play, and for some fine acting by Clare Harris, Barbara Couper, and Daphne Rye.

MANSFIELD HOUSE PLAYERS

This is a new and charming Little Theatre attached to the Mansfield House Settlement in Plaistow. The Theatre holds some 180 seats, but the stage is a good deal larger than usual in theatres of this type. On Saturday, February 25th, was produced "Noah" by André Obey, in the English version by Arthur Wilmurt. Excellent acting throughout by members of the Mansfield House Theatre Guild. Production by Margaret Omar.

BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE FESTIVAL OF COMMUNITY DRAMA

SOME FIXTURES FOR MARCH

(The Adjudicator's name is in Italics)

- March 1st. Town Hall, Taunton, 8 p.m. *C. B. Purdom.*
- March 1st. Spa Theatre, Saltburn, 7.30 p.m. *Margaret Marshall.*
- March 1st. York. *Alida Richardson.*
- March 1st. St. Peter's Hall, Croydon. *G. F. Campbell-Browne.*
- March 2nd. St. John's Hall, Middlesbrough, at 7.30 p.m. *Margaret Marshall.*
- March 2nd. Drama Hall, Bridgwater, 8 p.m. *C. B. Purdom.*
- March 2nd to 4th. Hereford, *John Fernald.*
- March 3rd. Village Hall, Ormesby, 7.30 p.m. *Margaret Marshall.*
- March 4th. Burkes Hall, Beaconsfield, 8.15 p.m. *Raymond Birt.*
- March 4th (Divisional Final). Y.M.C.A. Hall, Granby Street, Leicester. *F. Sladen-Smith.*
- March 4th. Arcadia Theatre, Scarborough, 7.30 p.m. *Margaret Marshall.*
- March 4th. Grammar School, Newport Road, Stafford. *Jack Carlton.*
- March 4th. Ralli Hall, Hove. *G. F. Campbell-Browne.*
- March 4th. Bournemouth. *Molly Francis.*
- March 4th. Institute Hall, Painswick, 7 p.m. *C. B. Purdom.*
- March 6th. Milton Rooms, Malton, 7.30 p.m. *Margaret Marshall.*
- March 6th. The Senior Council School, Market Rasen. *Evan John.*
- March 6th. County School, Frome, 8 p.m. *C. B. Purdom.*
- March 6th to 9th. Corn Exchange, Maidstone. *G. F. Campbell-Browne.*
- March 7th. Central Y.M.C.A., Bristol, 7.30 p.m. *C. B. Purdom.*
- March 7th. People's Theatre, Newcastle. *Duncan Marks.*
- March 7th. The Playhouse, Brigg. *Evan John.*
- March 7th. Public Hall, Slough, 7.45 p.m. *Raymond Birt.*
- March 8th. Central Y.M.C.A., Bristol, 7.30 p.m. *C. B. Purdom.*
- March 8th. The Public Hall, Caistor. *Evan John.*
- March 9th. Central Hall, Kettering. *Raymond Birt.*
- March 9th. Bingham Hall, Cirencester, 8 p.m. *C. B. Purdom.*
- March 9th. The Town Hall, Louth. *Evan John.*
- March 10th. The Council School, Alford. *Evan John.*
- March 10th. Prince's Theatre, Yeovil, 7.45 p.m. *C. B. Purdom.*
- March 11th. Fanny Marshall Institute, Gainsborough. *Evan John.*
- March 11th. Corn Exchange, Abingdon. *Raymond Birt.*
- March 11th. Notts R.C.C. (Matinee). *Richard Southern.*
- March 11th. Weymouth. *Molly Francis.*
- March 11th. Corfield Hall, Taunton, 2.30 p.m. *C. B. Purdom.*
- March 13th. Victoria Hall, Salisbury, 8 p.m. *C. B. Purdom.*
- March 14th. Brecon Little Theatre. *Rupert Harvey.*
- March 14th and 15th. Albert Hall, Colchester. *Molly Francis.*
- March 14th to 18th. Barrow-in-Furness. *Leonard Crainford.*
- March 15th. Otley. *John Fernald.*
- March 15th. Tonyfelen Hall, Caerphilly. *Rupert Harvey.*
- March 16th. Welfare Hall, Tongwynlais. *Rupert Harvey.*
- March 17th and 18th. St. John's Hall, Richmond. *G. F. Campbell-Browne.*
- March 17th and 18th. St. Dominic's High School, Stoke-on-Trent. *John Fernald.*
- March 18th. Lymington. *Molly Francis.*
- March 18th (County Carlisle Final, afternoon and evening). *J. Wilton Anstey.*
- March 18th. Hull. *Raymond Birt.*
- March 18th. New Welfare Hall, Trecynon. *Rupert Harvey.*
- March 20th. The Palace, Treharris. *Rupert Harvey.*
- March 20th. Halifax. *John Fernald.*
- March 21st. The Palace, Treharris. *Rupert Harvey.*
- March 21st. Burley. *John Fernald.*
- March 22nd. Welfare Hall, Ammanford. *Rupert Harvey.*
- March 23rd. Welfare Hall, Blackwood. *Rupert Harvey.*
- March 25th. All Saints' Hall, Heneage Road, Grimsby.
- March 27th (Divisional Final). Richmond Theatre, Richmond. *Michael MacOwan.*
- March 28th to April 1st. Western Area, Western Division Preliminaries. *J. Wilton Anstey.*
- March 30th and 31st. Temperance Hall, Bamsley. *John Fernald.*

FESTIVAL FINAL DATES

- April 13th, 14th, and 15th.
SCOTTISH AREA, INVERNESS
MURRAY MACDONALD.
- April 26th.
WELSH AREA, BARRY, GLAM.
MILES MALLESON.
- April 29th.
WESTERN AREA, BRISTOL.
RICHARD SOUTHERN.
- May 1st.
EASTERN AREA, LONDON.
E. MARTIN BROWNE.
- May 6th.
NORTHERN AREA, LIVERPOOL.
MICHEL ST. DENIS.
- MAY 22nd.
NATIONAL FINAL, LONDON.
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